

February 24, 2010

Mr. Randell H. Iwasaki
Director
California Department of Transportation
Post Office Box 942873
Sacramento, California 94273-0001

Dear Mr. Iwasaki,

My top priorities include the health and well-being of California's children, and the reduction of childhood obesity has a major role to play in improving both. Over the past 30 years, obesity rates have more than tripled. This epidemic is especially concerning in our low-income communities, where more than 30 percent of our children and youth are now overweight.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a critical program in the fight against obesity because it helps provide safe environments in which youth can be more physically active in their daily lives. SRTS is pivotal in changing neighborhoods around schools so that young Californians can safely walk and ride their bikes.

I applaud the California Department of Transportation's work and success in implementing our nation-leading SRTS program, as well as Caltrans' recent partnership with the California Department of Public Health and the University of California, San Francisco to create the SRTS Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC) to help communities apply for and implement SRTS.

It is crucial that we find ways to support the active engagement of low-income communities in SRTS, especially in urban core neighborhoods where children may need to walk along high-volume, multi-lane routes with sidewalks that may be broken or poorly lit. Caltrans has already taken an important step forward by funding TARC, but there is still a need to better understand the demographics of communities applying for and receiving SRTS funding and to develop strategies to ensure equitable access to SRTS funds. I need your help to make this possible.

I am directing Caltrans to take the following actions to help California increase its support for low-income schools and communities to participate in Safe Routes to School:

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1. Through the SRTS Technical Assistance Resource Center:
 - a. Determine the socioeconomic status (SES) of current and past SRTS program participants and determine the appropriate level of participation among these schools and communities.
 - b. Complete a review of funding practices in other programs that have been effective in securing high participation levels from low-SES schools and communities. Some of the practices could include: preferential or "priority points" for applicants for projects in low-SES schools; planning grants for communities to help prepare them for full applications; and developing guidelines, training, or other capacity-building strategies to increase the ability of low-SES communities to compete effectively for funding.
2. Based upon the findings of this review, adapt Caltrans' funding priorities and criteria to increase participation in SRTS among low-SES, disadvantaged schools and communities.

Please complete this analysis and review by July 1, 2010, so that Caltrans can revise policies and procedures as needed for future SRTS funding cycles.

I also ask that you work with me to encourage Congress and the federal administration to expand funding for SRTS through the transportation reauthorization process, and provide relief from cumbersome federal regulations to help increase successful participation in the Safe Routes to School program for low-income communities.

I very much appreciate your ongoing commitment to helping me address childhood obesity and to the role of Safe Routes to School in that important work.

Sincerely

Arnold Schwarzenegger

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cc: The Honorable Dale Bonner, Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing
Mr. Martin Tuttle, Deputy Director of Planning and Modal Programs
Mr. Denix Anbiah, Chief, Division of Local Assistance